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ABSTRACT

In U.S. schools the teachers are predominantly white, and most have little or no experience with cross-cultural issues. The increasing student diversity means that the schools are multicultural, but the teacher staff is not. It has become imperative that teachers be educated to teach about diverse cultures. James Banks has developed a theory of five dimensions of multicultural education that allow teachers to engage in self-actualization while addressing curriculum issues. The five dimensions are: (1) content integration; (2) the knowledge construction process; (3) an equity pedagogy; (4) prejudice reduction; and (5) creating an empowering school culture and social structure. Developing a "border pedagogy," as outlined by Barry Kanpol means that teachers will seek similarities within differences to incorporate the "other" into social relations and to identify with those who have felt alienation and oppression. Self-reflection will enable teachers to develop this border pedagogy. (SLD)

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# Multiculturalism: Similarities and Differences

by Jeanne Hernandez-Tutop

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## MULTICULTURALISM: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

### Introduction

According to Chavez (Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998) more than 30 percent of our students that comprise the K-12 school population are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. This includes more than 40 percent being Hispanics and an increase of more than 100 percent being Asian and Pacific Islanders. *"From 1976 to 1990, the percentage of White students enrolled . . . decreased almost 17% . . . the enrollment of Black African Americans decreased about 2% to a total of 16%, the enrollment of Hispanics increased by 68% to a total of 12%, and the percentage of Asian Pacific Islanders enrolled increased approximately 158% to a total of 3% (Lewis 1996, pg.1)."* In the 90's, children eighteen years of age and younger were 40 percent Hispanics, 33 percent African American and 25 percent white European Americans. By the year 2000 it is predicted that approximately 45 percent of our students will be ethnically diverse and of color.

The teaching population is 85 to 90 percent white and female (Chavez & O'Donnell 1998). Lewis (1996, pg.1) reported that *"in 1990-91, 9.2% of public elementary and secondary teachers were Black African American, 3.1% were Hispanic, and 1% were Asian Pacific Islanders."* Nieto (Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998) concurs by reporting there are currently 2.3 million public school teachers; of these, less than 10 percent are minority teachers. The student population does not coincide with the teaching staff of our schools. Lewis illustrates the discrepancies of the race/ethnicity of the teaching force and student population in the table below.

**Percentage of Public Elementary and Secondary Student Enrollments and Teachers by Race/Ethnicity, 1990**

| | % ENROLLMENT | % TEACHERS |
|---|---|---|
| White | 68.0 | 86.0 |
| Black | 16.0 | 9.2 |
| Hispanic | 12.0 | 3.1 |
| Asian/Pacific Islanders | 3.0 | 1.0 |

As the above table indicates our teachers are predominately white, and most likely have had little or no personal experience in cross-cultural issues. Our schools are multicultural, and our teaching staff is not. The next section will discuss multiculturalism, and the third section will give suggestions on how to incorporate its ideologies into the classroom.

**Multiculturalism**

Most people [in the United States] think that the 1930's - 1950's were non-activists times. However, during this time Jim Crow legislation was held in place by the Supreme Court's Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of 1898; laws at every level of government legalized sex discrimination; the Bureau of Indian Affairs mediated to native Americans; and the national power-structure was white and male.

> *The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man of 1948 is the first regional instrument presenting a catalogue of cultural rights. Its Article XIII provides:*

*Every person has the right to take part in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to participate in the benefits that result from intellectual progress, especially scientific discoveries.*

*He likewise has the right to the protection of his moral and material interests as regards his inventions or any literary, scientific or artistic works of which he is the author. (Symonides 1998)*

The late 1960's and early 1970's was intense with social change. Thousands of youths participated in trying to make changes to social and political arenas. The years following the active 70's showed a mass decline in social activism. Why? Sleeter (Chavez & O'Donnell 1998, pg. xiv) explained this phenomenon by stating

*"...the causes are not as clear . . . many people today experience a tension between challenging 'the system' and trying to survive in it. As economic security appears uncertain, good jobs appear scarce, the gap between rich and poor widens, and a conservative political and cultural discourse predominates in media, many young people worry mainly about their own personal futures and far less about the futures of 'the other'."*

At the World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico City [1982] delegates stressed the awareness their people were feeling of cultural identity, pluralism, of their rights to be different, and of the mutual respect one culture has for another. At this conference it was stated *"cultural identity is a treasure which vitalizes mankind's possibilities for self-fulfilment by encouraging every people and every group to seek nurture in the past, to welcome contributions from outside compatible with their own characteristics, and so to continue the process of their own creation (Symonides, 1998, pg.3)."*

UNESCO clarified the term "culture" as more than works and knowledge an elite produces, is not confined to works of art or humanities, *"but is at one and the same time the acquisition of knowledge, the demand for a way of life and the need to communicate . . . Nowadays, culture embraces the education system, the mass media, the cultural industries (Symonides, 1998, pg.5)."*

Because our schools are becoming more diverse, and our teaching staff is predominately white-female, it is imperative that we give attention to educating our teachers to teach concerning diverse culture. Nieto (Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998) writes that since most of our teachers are white and have been exposed to a monocultural education they need more than a few workshops to prepare them to teach students who are from different backgrounds, have different values, and different experiences than themselves.

Today, the activist still exists, they are just not in the numbers they were in twenty or more years ago. The United States is becoming more diverse and this is evident in our schools' populations.

According to Grant and Sachs (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995, pg. 89) *"multicultural education developed in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia during the 1970s as an educational concept and process to help galvanize and articulate the competing social and political interests of diverse ethnic and cultural groups (e.g., blacks, women)."* The issues that multicultural education addressed were equal opportunity, gender equity, ethnic identity and cultural diversity, and cultural pluralism. These issues were to be implemented into schools.

**Multiculturalism in the Classrooms**

hooks (1994) addressed the issue of teachers' and students' coming to a cultural understanding by stating, when teachers are *"engaged in their own process of self-actualization . . . authentic . . . engagement occur among students and teachers in classrooms" (Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998, pg.274).* James Banks, director of the University of Washington's Center for Multicultural Education, developed a concept called "the five dimensions of multicultural education that allows teachers to engage in self-actualization while addressing curriculum issues. These five dimensions are (Tucker, 1998):

1. Content Integration — putting content on different cultures (i.e., Mexican Americans or African Americans).
2. Knowledge Construction Process — teachers help students explore the undisputed cultural belief and frames of reference of the subject they are teaching.
3. Equity Pedagogy — teachers use diverse teaching strategies and techniques to allow everyone a chance to learn the most from each field of study possible (i.e., cooperative groups, simulations, role-playing, discovery).
4. Prejudice Reduction — method's teachers use to assist students in developing positive racial attitudes.
5. Creating an Empowering School Culture and Social Structure — looking past the classroom, examining the whole school culture to ensure equity.

Barry Kanpol (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995) explains, in his book *Critical Multiculturalism: Uncommon Voices in a Common Struggle*, that both theory and practice of multiculturalism must include the idea of 'border pedagogy', which includes identifying and empathizing with

differences, and associating similarities between race, class, and gender commonalities. Similarity within difference is the key to border pedagogy. This means to have empathy for the 'other'. Kanpol states *"within a border pedagogy, teachers will simultaneously seek similarities within differences to empathetically incorporate the Other into social relations, as well as identify with those who have felt alienation and certain forms of suffering and oppression, even though our respective particular circumstances may have differed"*(pg.180).

How can this 'border pedagogy' be brought into the classroom? It would be the responsibility of the teacher to find the intersection of his or her experiences of race, class and gender and the similarities of his or her students. It is through this self-reflection that the teacher and students celebrate the similarities of differences and learn respect, understanding, and empathy for each other.

**Concluding Statements**

> *There is within the inner-city schools a movement to incorporate other cultures through activities involving understanding different dress and food and on-going experimental research activities about cultures among students. In the suburbs of Harrisburg, in predominantly white middle-class Anglo schools, mulitculturalism is, quite simply, a myth...the inner-city schools' population consists of black and Hispanic people, yet they still explore difference. (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995, pg. 179).*

Our country is very diverse, and we are better for that very reason. However, we as a nation must learn to accept each others culture. Both Banks and Kanpol have excellent ideas to address multiculturalism in the classrooms. Multicultural education must begin in kindergarten and continue throughout the educational process. Self-reflection and actualization must be part of



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the living process if the many issues that face a multicultural nation are to be addressed.

Respect for history of each culture is an important item to be addressed in our classrooms. Every culture has written their own slant to history, and it would benefit us all if the curriculum included these different viewpoints. We all want to feel good about ourselves and it cannot happen if the only good person is White-Anglo and middle or upper class.

A school that does not have a multicultural student body, should not impede the exploration of other cultures and their contributions in all subject areas. To learn empathy, everyone — oppressors and the oppressed — must see through the eyes of the OTHER.

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